



Empowering Through Education: Nep-2020's Vision of Inclusive Transformation

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Abstract

The NEP 2020 is the first education policy of the twenty-first century, succeeding the thirty-four-year-old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986. This is a highly comprehensive policy that covers all levels of schooling. The policy is in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aspires to transform India into a worldwide information giant by making education more holistic, adaptable, and multidisciplinary. It recognizes the fundamental pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability. This is appropriate for the twenty-first century and aims to bring out each student's individual potential. It includes all of the elements that will lead to the complete inclusion of disabled children in India's educational system. However, there are many gaps and issues that must be addressed from the perspective of a disability activist.

Key Words: *National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), Foundational Pillars, Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.*

Introduction:

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020), based on the four core pillars of "Accessibility, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability," is the first education policy of the twenty-first century that aspires to address our country's numerous expanding developmental imperatives. The NEP intends to develop India into a thriving knowledge hub. "This Policy recommends revising and revamping all aspects of the educational structure, including regulation and governance, in order to create a new system that is aligned with the appartilional goals of 21st century education, including the sustainable development goal of ensuring free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education for all children, while keeping India's traditions and value systems in mind. The New Education Policy (2020) is a historic initiative and the first policy compilation in thirty-four years. The NEP 2020 mentions inclusive education, as does the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 addresses the country's education system's growing inequality and injustice. Based on the suggestions of the 'Kasturirangan Committee,' inclusive education will be included in the NEP 2020".(2019). "The National Education Policy 2020 acknowledges significant dropout rates among socioeconomic groups and disadvantaged minorities. The most essential of them is recognizing the barriers that lead to inefficient resource provision, such as tiny school campuses and lower participation of rural female children. The strategy also addresses the unmet educational needs of children living in challenging areas of the country. It also found that the NEP 2020 has some limitations in approaches and concerns to promoting and implementing inclusive education" (Halder&

Jana; 2023).The following are some significant proposals on inclusive education, as well as some of the key limits of NEP 2020:

1. Identification of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)

The National Education Policy 2020 recognises that the existing educational system in India fails to adequately address the needs of certain sectors of the population. For the purpose of meeting their educational requirements, the NEP has created a new social category known as Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), which incorporates gender, socio-cultural identity, geographical identity, disability, and socio-economic status. There are a number of factors contributing to the higher dropout rates among these groups, such as the difficulty in reaching tribal settlements, the long-standing exclusion of indigenous people from formal education, the categorization based on sociocultural identity, and many more. Targeted scholarships, conditional money transfers to encourage parents to send their children to school, and transportation assistance in the form of bicycles are just a few of the policies and programmes proposed by the NEP 2020 to address the specific challenges posed by the SEDGs.

The NEP imposes a great deal of limitation as well; for example, it does not need reservations or acknowledge caste as a historical obstacle. Similarly, despite these groups' persistent bias, few recognize the many institutional obstacles that hinder their success in educational institutions. Additionally, the policy does not specify what kind of positive action must be taken in order to be recognized. The bare minimum for ensuring their fair representation—caste inclusion and affirmative action—is not even mentioned. Additionally, affirmative action and inclusion of caste are not recognized in the hiring of teachers.

2. Recognition of Gendered Identities

“Gender identity reflects how individuals categorize themselves on the basis of gender and how do they show their behavior and self-manifestation in accordance with that classification” (Baqtayan, 2014). “After identity perception development the transgender person looks for different means of gender expression for enhanced identity comprehension, followed by a culminating stage in which they establish their gender identity explicitly and perform their desired gender”.(Krishna, 2017).”The NEP 2020 recognizes that female and transgender individuals across all the groups and socio-economic categories are the people who are worst affected. There are some interesting schemes suggested by the policy of giving out bicycles to form cycling groups and creating walking groups to schools to include community participation and make safety nets for these vulnerable students. Further, policy proposes the creation of a ‘Gender-Inclusion Fund’ recognizing critical needs of education of the girl child, the new to create better educational spaces for women and transgender, which will be available to states to create systems that will help the inclusion of these students, initiate provisions of sanitation, conditional cash transfers, bicycle distribution schemes, etc. Furthermore, funds will also enable states to support and scale up effective community-based interventions that address local context-specific barriers to female and transgender children’s access to and participation in education. In this regard, the policy recommends establishment of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya to provide better boarding facilities for students to tackle geographical barriers to education”.

These innovative suggestions and ideas aren't going to get the NEP any closer to addressing the fundamental problems with inclusion and starting the talks that are lacking in our current educational institutions. Despite the pervasiveness of transgender people's experiences with prejudice, educational curricula have historically avoided addressing this issue. Despite the legal abolition of Article 377, discussions about identity continue to be socially taboo, and these people are not even given the fundamental respect that they need. Because of this, there have been many instances of prejudice against these people in the past. One CBSE news release states that 1,889,878 students applied for the 10th grade and 1,206,893 for the 12th. Only nineteen pupils identified as transgender took the class ten test. Of the total number of students enrolled, 7,88,195 were female and 11,01,664 were male. There were 5,22,819 females, 6,84,068 males, and 6 transgender people in the 12th grade. The aforementioned statistics make it quite clear that transgender students are the most

underrepresented minority in Indian classrooms. Transgender people are overrepresented, and the numerical discrepancy is a clear sign of it. In addition to failing to address the prejudice that these kids encounter in Indian classrooms, the policy fails to summarize strategies for increasing enrollment for these students.

3. Recognition of Children with Special Needs (CSNs)

“The concept of recognition, which includes three aspects of social justice (economic, cultural and political), argues that the institutional arrangements that prevent ‘parity of participation’ in the school social life of the children with special needs are affected not only by economic distribution but also by the patterns of cultural values”. (Šmid, 2016). “The NPE 2020 recognizes children with special needs and reflects about incorporating their needs into the mainstream education systems with the help of curriculum adaptations. It has suggested the changes considering the objectives of The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016. The policy recommends the recruitments of special educators in all school complexes mandatory to make sure that teaching is more inclusive and cognizant of the needs of children. Home-tutoring will be allowed to opt for children with severe disabilities and would be supplied with competent home-tutoring educators so that they can however learn and acquire the best educational facilities. Trained teachers will be employed for early identification of learning disabilities in children so that to help children to succeed in education and take care of their mental health. PARAKH, a National Assessment Centre, will be formulated to create equitable systems of assessment for children with learning disabilities. A proposal to create alternate models for schooling are to advance this objective”.

But in this regard, the NEP seems to be too idealistic and ambitious. Problematically, it doesn’t take into account the reality that schools and instructors aren’t prepared for this experiment; in India, for example, most schools are severely understaffed and teachers have inadequate training. Also, the policy doesn’t include anything about how to provide accessible alternatives to home tutoring. According to the most recent numbers provided by the Delhi Child Rights Commission, 60% of schools claimed having no pupils with impairments, while 28% reported having less than 1%. The above statistics show that, compared to the general population, individuals with disabilities have more negative social and economic consequences. At its core, the new strategy does not address the question of how these people will be able to get the education they need. Furthermore, it fails to outline the changes to the curriculum that would help students with learning difficulties succeed in today’s cutthroat Indian classrooms.

4. Formation of Special Educational Zones (SEZs)

The NEP recommends, among other things, that places with a disproportionate number of members of the Socio Economically Disadvantaged Group (SEDG) be designated as Special Educational Zones (SEZs). The main objective of this idea is to reach the most remote parts of India and provide them with education. A combination of federal and state projects and initiatives, together with the deployment of extra funding to revive depressed regions, will achieve this goal. Schools must provide a variety of resources, including assistive technology and supporting equipment, to fulfill the needs of all pupils. The creation of resource centres could be useful for both traditional schools and homeschooling parents. The state’s support for schools and parents is crucial if everyone can afford a good education. An Individualized Programme and orientation courses are part of NEP 2020, which also involves home-tutoring parents and children with a range of disabilities. When it comes to children with impairments, the psychological proverb “No two children are alike” is just as relevant. For that reason, tailoring a successful programme to the needs of these children is an ongoing challenge.

“The challenge again lies in policy, while this idea is novel and holds potential to transform educational access in areas of the country such as urban slums or ghettos with substantial minority population, but the policy hasn’t specified what the criterion for these zones would be and how will they be distinguished in urban and rural areas. The policy has no clear indicator of what the determining factors would be for the establishment of these”. Bansal and Bewtra (2022) stressed that this would be done by pumping extra

resources and aligning multiple schemes and programmes of Centre and states to transform these backward regions.

Conclusion:

Recognizing the struggles of minorities and children with special needs, the NEP 2020 has done an excellent job. Among its many commendable proposals is the creation of special educational zones to help underserved communities overcome the systemic obstacles to minority education in geographically isolated areas. The policy has unfairly treated long-established socioeconomic groups like the Dalits and the Adivasis, even if it has suggested a new category for administrative efficiency and improved resource distribution. The educational obstacles that these groups encounter are ignored in this way. At the time of implementation, it may raise many issues due to its silence on affirmative action for specific groups. Access to education should not be a moral dilemma; it should be a fundamental human right for all children, regardless of their capacity to pay. It is about time that people in India, a nation known for its variety, changed their perspective and saw each impairment as a unique talent, just as the country has always seen diversity as an opportunity. With careful preparation, the New Education Policy 2020 may usher in a paradigm change in inclusive education and serve as a catalyst for its implementation.

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